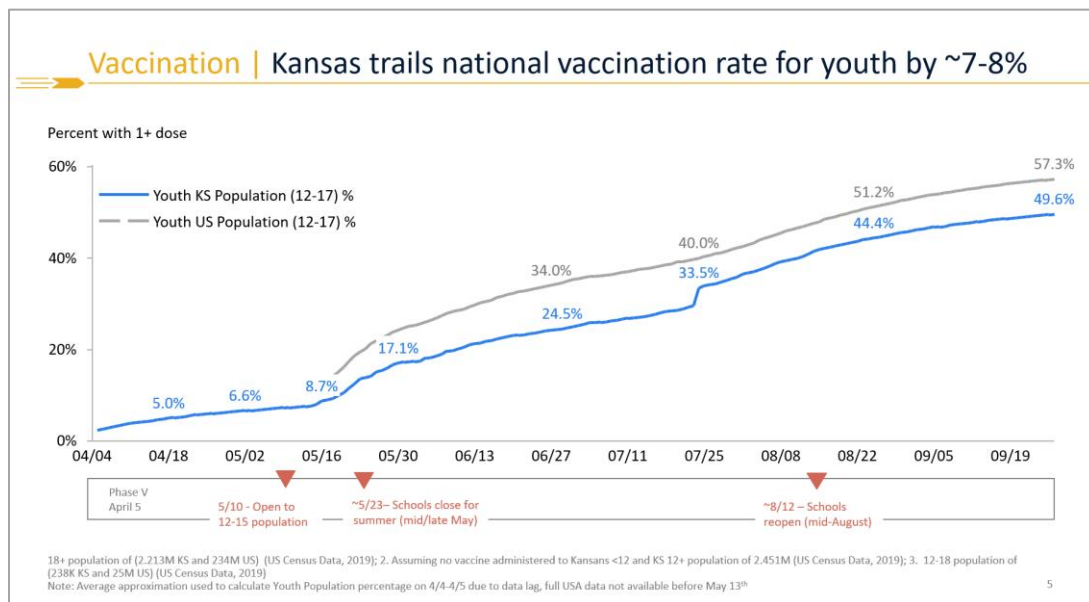


SAFER CLASSROOMS WORKGROUP
Weekly Report
September 29th, 2021

Dr. Stephanie Kuhlmann, co-chair of the Governor’s Safer Classrooms Workgroup, led the Workgroup discussion on updates including the soon-to-launch KDHE school data dashboard and prospective timeline of vaccine eligibility of 5-to-11-year-olds, methods employed by schools to limit the risk and severity of outbreaks and increase vaccination rates, recent research on the association between student masking policies and school outbreaks, and the provider community’s stance on COVID-19 messaging to patients.



COVID-19 school metrics summary

The Workgroup reviewed the latest data pertaining to Kansas schoolchildren across the three key public health tools to keep school safely open:

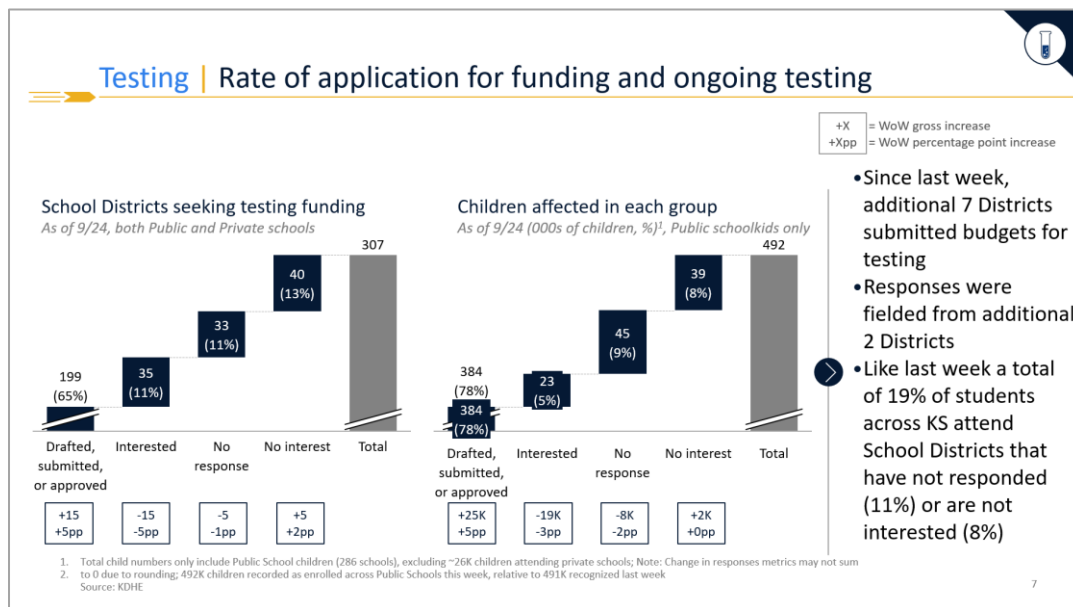
1. **Vaccination:** Kansas’s youth vaccination rate continues to trail the national average by 8%. Johnson, Douglas, and Riley Counties continue to lead the state in vaccination rate. Children under the age of 12 remain ineligible to be vaccinated – but Pfizer BioNTech intends to submit trial data and apply for emergency use authorization (EUA) for 5-to-11-year-olds by the end of September. Experts anticipate that EUA will be granted by the beginning of November. KDHE is currently planning for the vaccine roll-out for this new group
2. **Testing:** Fifteen more Kansas School Districts applied for testing funding since last week; 78% of Kansas schoolchildren now attend school in Districts that have drafted, submitted, or received funding for testing. 73 total School Districts (impacting 19% of schoolchildren) still have not responded or have responded with no interest to offers of testing funding; 5 more School Districts responded that they are not interested in testing funding. Currently 115 School Districts are reporting testing metrics to KDHE, an

increase of 15 schools reporting in metrics since last week. ~500 cases of COVID were confirmed this week across 77 Districts. Total tests reported this week fell relative to last week despite the increase in the number of schools reporting in.

3. **Masking:** There were no incremental responses to KDHE's masking survey this week. 37% of students attend schools in Districts where masks are required; the same number attend schools in Districts where masking policies are still unknown.

There were 72 active outbreaks in schools as of this week, with 537 cases related to outbreaks confirmed.

Why this matters and what this means: The Workgroup members continue to assist on the collection of accurate and complete data on masking and testing status across Kansas schools. To increase transparency on COVID-19 in Kansas schools, KDHE will publish a publicly-available live school data dashboard by the end of this week; the dashboard will report out on District-level outcomes. This data is an important input for educators, school boards, School Districts, physicians, policymakers, and other child advocates to develop policies to best serve the students they represent.



View from Schools

As discussed last week, Kansas's [innovative "test to stay" program](#) was designed to maximize students' ability to stay in school safely. This week, members of the Workgroup raised examples of where the "test to stay" program has been effective in realizing this goal. Soon, schools will also play a critical role in vaccinating 5-to-11-year-olds once emergency use authorization (EUA) for the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine is granted for this age group. Expanding vaccination to this age group will help limit outbreak risk in schools that currently have large cohorts of unvaccinated, ineligible students.

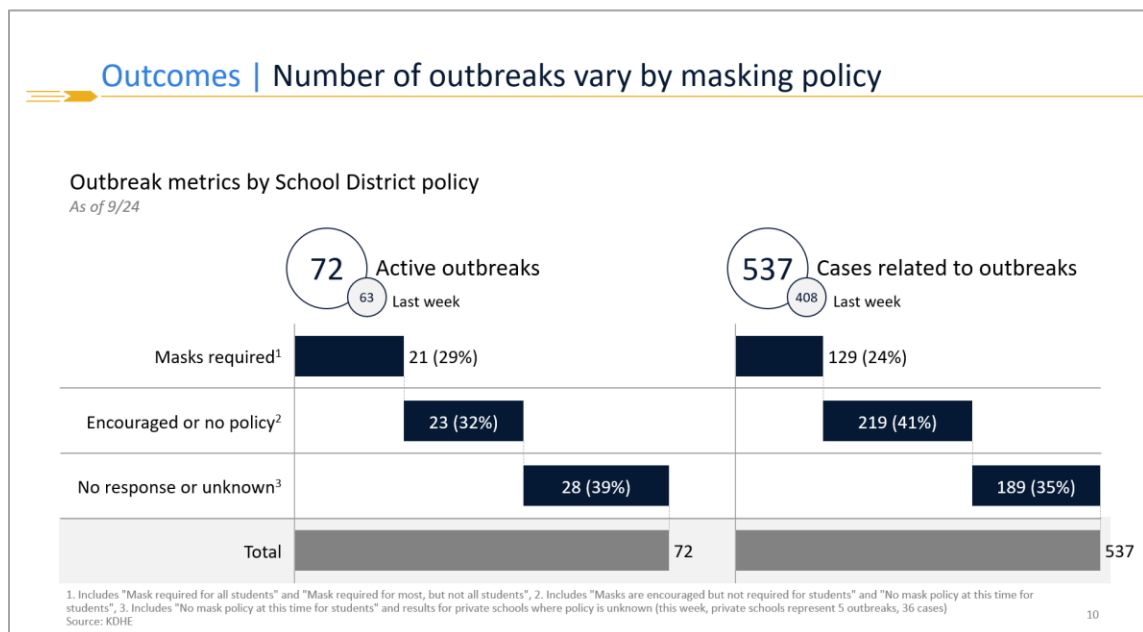
Topics discussed:

- Rock Creek / St. George Elementary School (USD 323) experienced an outbreak in late August / early September and employed the "test to stay" method. Superintendent Kevin Logan calculated that 782 in-person instruction days were saved by increased testing during the outbreak; in the 2020-21 schoolyear, Rock Creek / St. George Elementary lost ~7,000 in-person instruction days due to COVID-19 outbreaks.

- Dr. Jen Brull shared that in Rooks County, a school testing program helped identify two asymptomatic students early, thereby limiting the spread of a potential outbreak and minimizing the necessary contact-tracing efforts.
- Margaret Thompson noted that at Garden Parks Academy in Wichita, KS, a vaccine festival was hosted with food, music, and educational information to create a fun / stimulating environment for families to get vaccinated. While there were challenges in vaccine supply at this event, the concept was well-received and can be leveraged at other vaccination events.
- Workgroup members discussed the importance of a more regular collection of masking data, given that some schools' policies will have changed since the start of the schoolyear in accordance with the rates of COVID-19 in their schools.
- Some School Boards have made District-level mask mandates impermissible; in these cases, some School Districts have employed "test to stay" programs that help limit absenteeism in the absence of a mask mandate.

Why this matters and what this means:

- School Districts are encouraged to work with school specialists and with Dr. Watson to maintain and up-to-date view on their masking policies and testing activities, especially where regular changes made. State Epidemiologist Dr. Farah Ahmed suggested a weekly questionnaire posed at the District level to maintain current data on masking policies across Districts.
- The Workgroup will consider any incremental data that would be useful to help guide decision-making among School Districts and School Boards and bring ideas to next week's meeting.
- Individual schools can get creative in their efforts to bring children and families together to make the experience of getting vaccinated fun and engaging.
- School Districts are encouraged to take note of where policies have been effective and share key learnings and takeaways with other Districts.



View from Health care providers

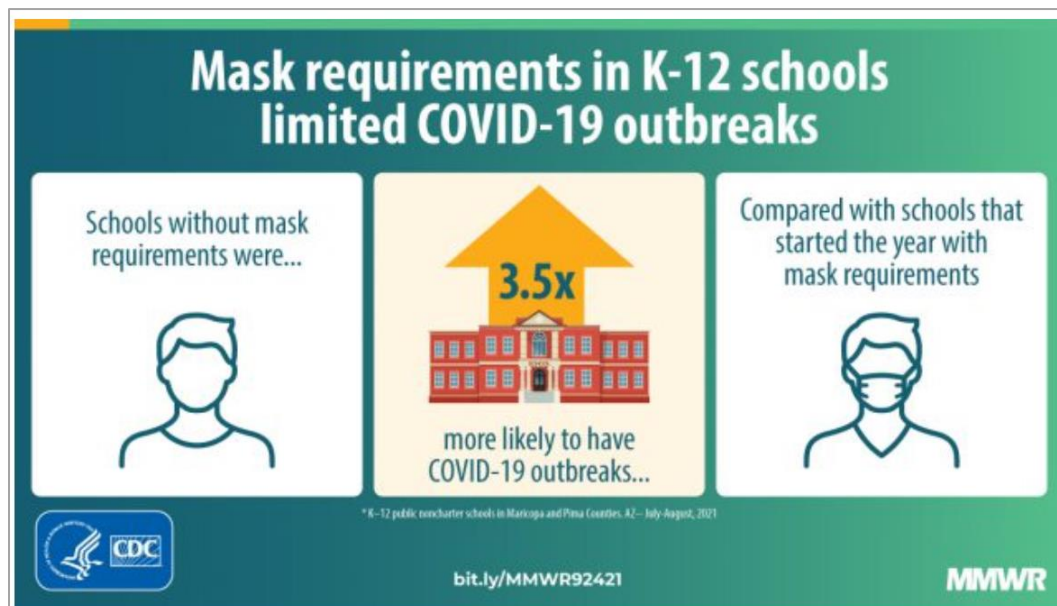
The Workgroup discussed two recent CDC publications on the association between K-12 school mask policies and school-associated COVID-19 outbreaks, published on September 24 in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.

Topics discussed:

- In the [first report](#) published by the CDC, authors leveraged data from schools across the two most populous Counties in Arizona. Outcomes were studied across these archetypes through the first weeks of the 2021-22 schoolyear; schools without mask requirements were 3.5x more likely to have COVID-19 outbreaks compared with schools that started the schoolyear with mask requirements.
- In the [second report](#) published by the CDC, data from 520 Counties were analyzed to assess the association between County-level pediatric COVID-19 cases and school mask requirements. Counties with no mask requirements had, within 1-2 weeks of the start of school, ~19 more cases per 100,000 students vs. Counties with mask requirements.

Why this matters and what this means:

- Workgroup members discussed sharing this research with superintendents and other school stakeholders to help inform choices on masking policy.
- This data published by the CDC is some of the earliest data around the efficacy of masking tactics in schools specifically; School Districts, superintendents, and School Boards are encouraged to leverage this research to help inform their choices on in-school policies. The pool of available data and analysis will grow as schools continue teaching into the late fall and winter months.



Updates from last week:

Last week, the Workgroup discussed the challenges of combatting the COVID misinformation. Following last week's conversation on the joint statement published by national organizations (the American Board of Family Medicine, American Board of Internal Medicine, and American Board of Pediatrics), the Kansas Chapter

American Academy of Physicians, the Kansas Academy of Family Physicians, and Kansas Medical Society are drafting a joint statement to promote frontline physicians' perspective on COVID-19 and reinforce the importance of physicians in providing Kansan families with accurate information on the vaccine.

Topics discussed:

- Workgroup members discussed the continued importance of physicians in supporting families through their choice to get vaccinated.
- Kansas Chapter American Academy of Physicians will be hosting a Town Hall for physicians and practice managers to promote a dialogue on mobilizing around vaccination efforts for 5-to-11-years-olds given the likely impending emergency use authorization (EUA) of the Pfizer BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for those under 12.
- The Kansas Board of Healing Arts recently fined a chiropractor suggesting that chiropractic techniques could help address COVID-19; this individual was fined \$4,000 and the Board reinforced that they would not tolerate misinformation spread by licensed providers.

Why this matters and what this means:

- Workgroup members will start a dialogue with physicians and providers in their networks to assess what communications materials and messaging support they will need to help educate families in preparation for the 5-to-11-year-old vaccine roll-out.
- The action taken by the Kansas Board of Healing Arts serves as an example for how the licensing bodies of the medical community are addressing instances of misinformation. The Workgroup discussed that both professional associations and licensing bodies have a role to play in combatting misinformation.

The Safer Classrooms Workgroup will meet next on October 6, 2021. The meeting will be livestreamed on the Governor's YouTube channel.